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# THE SOUTHWESTERN HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

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## THE EARLY SENTIMENT FOR THE ANNEXATION OF CALIFORNIA: AN ACCOUNT OF THE GROWTH OF AMERICAN INTEREST IN CALI- FORNIA, 1835-1846

### III

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### CHAPTER V

#### RUMORED EUROPEAN AGGRESSION IN CALIFORNIA; EFFECT UPON AMERICAN POLICY OF ANNEXATION

The reported designs of England and France to secure control of California before its annexation by the United States have led, first and last, to a vast amount of surmise and historically unprofitable speculation. So far as France is concerned, the actual purposes and plans of the government (if indeed they existed) remain still unknown. But within the last few years an examination of the British Public Record Office has cleared the subject of English aggression of most of its mystery.<sup>1</sup>

This investigation has shown that while, indeed, the British government, as such, had no intentions of acquiring California

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<sup>1</sup>This is due to the efforts of Professor Ephraim D. Adams of Leland Stanford Jr. University. The results of this investigation as published in his *British Interests and Activities in Texas* have already received some notice.

and in fact manifested comparatively little interest in its affairs, yet English officials in Mexico, California, and on board Her Majesty's vessels of the Pacific, on the contrary, were exceedingly anxious to place the province under English control; or, if that could not be, to thwart the ambitions of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

The activities of these British representatives and the occasional rumor of French intrigue naturally aroused no little concern throughout this country and created a genuine alarm lest one or the other power should endeavor to forestall our own plans regarding the province. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to examine, not the actual designs of France or England, but the effect of reports and rumors regarding these designs upon the government and people of the United States.

The earliest fears of English aggression seem to have arisen shortly after the publication of the history of California by Alexander Forbes in 1839. The book was intended not so much to convey historical information as to encourage the colonization of California by British subjects; and contained a plan, worked out in some detail, by which a cession of that territory might be made by Mexico in payment of her debt of \$50,000,000 to English bondholders. A company, composed of these creditors, was to be formed, and to it were to be given many of the same prerogatives of territorial sovereignty as those enjoyed by the British East India Company.<sup>3</sup>

Forbes's publication had a wide circulation, and,<sup>4</sup> as its whole tone was frankly a plea for English domination in California, aroused considerable comment throughout this country. It was said that negotiations, such as Forbes had suggested, were already

<sup>2</sup>Adams, *British Interests*, 234-264.

<sup>3</sup>Forbes, 153 (the eighth chapter was entitled "Upper California as a field for foreign colonization"). The author's brother wrote a preface for the book and, while declining to comment upon the plan of colonization, said it was one worthy the attention of the English bondholders and also of the government. The appendix contained articles on the harbor of California, steam navigation on the Pacific, and a prospectus of the "Pacific Steam Navigation Company." Forbes also laid great emphasis on the importance of constructing an Isthmian Canal under European control.

<sup>4</sup>See a review upon this work in the *Literature of American History*, Ed. for the American Library Association (Boston. Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1902).

in progress, and that England was taking this method of shutting the United States away from the Pacific and confining her domain to the country east of the Rocky Mountains—thus giving over to British control a monopoly of the East India and China trade.<sup>5</sup>

With the beginning of Tyler's administration the fear of English encroachments had become very real. Owing to the strained relations over the Texas, Oregon, and northeastern boundary questions, the faintest rumor of an attempt on the part of Great Britain to gain a foothold in California was sufficient not merely to excite the press of the country but to penetrate even into official circles.

*Seizure of Monterey.*—In 1842 came the seizure of Monterey by Commodore Jones, who gave as the compelling motive of his action that both he and other high officers of his fleet wished to preserve California from falling into the hands of "our great commercial rival," England. "The Creole affair," he wrote,

the question of the right of search, the mission of Lord Ashburton . . . the well founded rumor of a cession of the Californias, and lastly the secret movements of the English naval force in this quarter . . . have all occurred since the date of your last despatch. Consequently I am without instructions . . . upon what I consider a vital question to the United States . . . the occupation of California by Great Britain under a secret treaty with Mexico.<sup>6</sup>

*Warnings of Waddy Thompson.*—But Jones was not the only one in government employ who looked askance at England's motives. From Mexico City, Waddy Thompson was urging in his despatches to Tyler and Webster British aggression as an important reason for the acquisition of California by the United States. In the first of these he said:

France and England both have [had] their eyes upon it [California]; the latter has yet.—She has already control of the Sandwich Islands, of the Society Islands, New Zealand, etc., etc., and through the agency of that Embryo East India Monopoly, the Hudson Bay Co. she will ere long have a monopoly of the com-

<sup>5</sup>*Niles' Register*, LVIII, 2; *Ibid.*, 70 (quotations from the *New York American*, *New York Express*, *Baltimore American*, and the *New Orleans papers*). See also Bancroft, XXI, 110-112.

<sup>6</sup>Jones to Upshur, *H. Ex. Docs.*, 27 Cong., 3 sess., No. 116.

merce of the Pacific, and not an American flag will fly on its Coasts.<sup>7</sup>

Webster, however, appeared to treat this communication as of little moment, writing Thompson on June 27th that he thought England had no present designs upon California or even any objection to its acquisition by the United States.<sup>8</sup> But such an assurance was not sufficient for Thompson. In reply he wrote,

I have information upon which I can rely that an agent of this government is now in England negotiating for the sale, or what is precisely the same thing, the mortgage of Upper California for the loan of fifteen millions. In my first despatch, I glanced at the advantages which would result to our country from the acquisition. Great as those advantages would be, they sink in comparison with the evils to our commerce and other interests, even more important, from a cession of that country to England.<sup>9</sup>

Even this seems to have caused Webster no alarm; while with word of the seizure of Monterey, the subject disappears for the time from Thompson's correspondence. In January, however, he began again his refrain of warning, perhaps exaggerating his own fears to arouse the secretary of state whom he considered entirely too indifferent to the danger. After speaking of his earlier despatches upon England's purpose, and expressing some resentment that they had been treated so lightly, Thompson went on:

I know that England has designs on California and has actually made a treaty with Mexico securing to British creditors the right to lands there in payment of their debts and that England will

<sup>7</sup>Thompson to Webster, April 29, 1842. MS., State Department. The H. B. C. had but recently established a permanent post in California when Thompson wrote this. The governor of the company, Sir George Simpson, had left the country on Jan. 27, less than two months before Thompson's despatch, and had sent a long communication, designed for the British government, urging the importance and ease of securing California. Simpson to Sir John H. Pelly, Honolulu, March 10, 1842, in *American Historical Review*, XIV, 86-93, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup>Webster to Thompson, in *Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster* (National Edition. 1903), XIV, 612. Webster had derived his information from Ashburton. Ashburton to Webster, April 28, 1842. *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>9</sup>Thompson to Webster, July 30, 1842. MS., State Department. The remainder of the letter was filled with a report of English assistance to Mexico against Texas, and a statement of the close alliance between the two nations.

interpose this treaty in the way of a cession of California and that in ten years she will own the country.<sup>10</sup>

To all of this, however, Webster had the assurance of Everett and Ashburton regarding the tripartite agreement as sufficient answer.<sup>11</sup> But the country at large did not possess such reassuring evidence. So general became the feeling that Mexico had entered into such a treaty with England that the president was called upon by unanimous consent of the house to furnish any information in his possession as to the truth of the report.<sup>12</sup> To this he replied that the administration had no knowledge that confirmed the rumored negotiations.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps rebuffed by the reception of his information, Thompson had little more to say regarding England and California for some months; when, as we have seen, his views underwent a complete change and for the moment he hoped that an English-Mexican war might throw the province into the lap of the United States.<sup>14</sup> Following Thompson's resignation as minister, Benjamin E. Green, Shannon, and Duff Green, from time to time issued similar warnings to those Webster had received, and of which we have just spoken.

*English mortgage.*—Mexico, cultivating friendly relations with England,<sup>15</sup> was said to have mortgaged California to that country for \$26,000,000. The pledge expired in 1847 and, unless paid before that time, would result in the transfer of the country to Great Britain, whose control in this way would be extended not only over the whole of California, but eventually over Oregon as well.<sup>16</sup> Donelson, on his special mission to Texas, was sufficiently

<sup>10</sup>Thompson to Webster, Jan. 30, 1843. Webster MSS., Library of Congress. For any actual foundation for this despatch, see Adams, *British Interests*, etc., 237-240. Thompson still held his opinion in 1846. *Recollections*, 235.

<sup>11</sup>THE QUARTERLY, XVIII, 32-34. Tyler's biographer, however, gives as chief reason for the president's desire to bring about this tripartite agreement the report of the English mortgage. Tyler's *Tyler*, II, 260.

<sup>12</sup>*Niles' Register*, LXIII, 366.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>14</sup>THE QUARTERLY, XVIII, 34-35.

<sup>15</sup>B. E. Green to Secretary of State, April 8, 1844. MS., State Department.

<sup>16</sup>Duff Green to Calhoun, Oct. 28th. Calhoun *Correspondence*, 979. Green added that the British consul general in Mexico was agent for the English company, and advised the State Department to secure a copy of

interested in this report to inquire directly of Elliot as to its truth; but learned nothing of a satisfactory nature, and came to the conclusion that it rested on insufficient evidence.<sup>17</sup>

*The Hudson's Bay Company.*—Larkin, meanwhile, from California, had been doing his part by calling attention to the rapid encroachments of the Hudson's Bay Company, whose employees were trapping, cultivating land, building mills and establishing themselves in various ways in that country and also in Oregon. The San Francisco agent had asked for extensive grants of land upon which to settle colonists and had no intention of quitting the province when game became scarce.<sup>18</sup> These statements, sufficiently grave in themselves, received further emphasis from a letter of Henry A. Pierce, of Boston, read on the floor of the house about this time.<sup>19</sup>

*Report of Santa Anna's dealings with England.*—But even more disquieting reports came from Shannon. Santa Anna had been captured but a few days before by the forces of the opposition, and important documents were found on his person. Certain of these had been published by the new administration to discredit him with the people, and the rest laid before the Mexican Congress in secret session. "From a portion of this correspondence," concluded Shannon's despatch,

the fact has been disclosed that a negotiation was going on between President Santa Anna and the English Minister for the sale and purchase of the two Californias—That portion of the correspondence relating to this subject has not been published in the papers, but it has been laid before Congress in secret session and the pendency of such a negotiation may be relied upon as true—The English Minister has no doubt in this matter acted under instructions from his government; it may therefore be assumed that it is the settled policy of the English government to acquire the

the mortgage deed either through the Mexican or London legations. It could be had for \$1500 or \$2000 in Mexico. It should be remembered that Green was Calhoun's confidential agent.

<sup>17</sup>A. J. Donelson to Calhoun, Jan. 30, 1845. *Ibid.*, 1024.

<sup>18</sup>Larkin to Calhoun, June 20, 1844. MS., State Department; same to same, June 24th, and August 18th. *Official Correspondence*, Pt. II, No. 9. Larkin added he had seen a report in the paper that England might purchase California. For the reply to these despatches see Crallé to Larkin, Oct. 25. Larkin MSS., II, No. 233.

<sup>19</sup>*Ap. Cong. Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 sess., p. 226.

two Californias. You are aware that the English creditors have now a mortgage on them for twenty-six millions.<sup>20</sup>

For the present, however, Shannon thought the designs of England had received a set back in the overthrow of Santa Anna; and as the new administration were making political capital out of the disclosures regarding California, they would not themselves dare favor a measure similar to that of their discredited opponent. The report of Santa Anna's secret dealings received considerable publicity, both in this country and in Europe;<sup>21</sup> but exactly what foundation there was in fact for the rumor is not clear. It was about this time that Forbes, the British vice-consul at Monterey, was submitting his suggestion for an English protectorate through Barron;<sup>22</sup> and it may have been that some correspondence passed between the British representatives in Mexico and Santa Anna.

*Polk's suspicions.*—It was with such reports, as have already been cited, from Thompson, Green, Larkin and Shannon in the official files of the state department, and with even wilder rumors in the air, that Polk came to the President's office. Every outside influence, moreover, tended to make the new executive suspicious of England's policy. The unsettled Oregon boundary; the mutual spirit of animosity shown by the press of the two countries;<sup>23</sup> the whole western attitude and his schooling at the hands of Andrew Jackson; above all, the course of Great Britain with regard to Texas;<sup>24</sup> prepared him to accept the stories of English designs upon California with little hesitation.

<sup>20</sup>Shannon to Calhoun. MS., State Department.

<sup>21</sup>Raymond (Texas Legation at Washington) to Allen, Feb. 21, 1845. Garrison, *Tex. Dip. Cor.*, II, 364, in *Am. His. Ass'n Report*, 1908, II. See also extract from *Paris Presse* asserting that in the capture of Santa Anna had been revealed "one of the vastest projects which the undermining ambition of Great Britain ever conceived," in attempting to secure California. *Charleston Mercury*, March 10, 1845. The article was copied in the London papers without comment and denied in Parliament by both Peel and Palmerston. *Ibid.*, April 7th and 24th.

<sup>22</sup>For Forbes's plan and Aberdeen's reply see Adams, *British Interests*, 242-250.

<sup>23</sup>Buchanan, in a speech on the Oregon question, March 12, 1844, said that the whole press of England, irrespective of class or party, had teemed with abuse of all things American for two years, until the mind of the British public was thoroughly inflamed against the United States. *Ap. Cong. Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 sess., p. 350.

<sup>24</sup>For Polk's fear of English influence in Texas see his private correspondence as follows: Yell to Polk, March 26, 1845; same to same, May



*McNamarra project.*—Fresh reports, also, soon strengthened this belief. On May 13, the confidential agent, Wm. S. Parrott, wrote that the British fleet in the Pacific had been reenforced for the rumored purpose of taking and holding California in case of war between Mexico and the United States, using as an excuse for the action, the protection of English citizens in their mortgage claims on that province.<sup>25</sup> Later, Parrott said that the force bound from Mexico to California, to subdue the insurrection against Micheltorena, was to be commanded by an officer educated in France; and that the influence of this commander in California, according to reliable information, was to be used to the advantage of that nation by the French legation in Mexico. At any rate, said Parrott, "he certainly takes with him a large number of Frenchmen for some reason or other."<sup>26</sup>

A few days afterward, however, the American agent had occasion to change his Frenchmen into Irishmen, writing that the expedition had been delayed for lack of funds; while with it, "a young Irish Priest by the name of McNamarrah" was preparing to leave for California for the purpose of introducing Irish immigrants.<sup>27</sup> In this, it should be remarked, Parrott was not building wholly on his imagination.<sup>28</sup>

*Larkin's despatch of July 10th.*—In the fall, more emphatic despatches reached the state department. On October 11, Buchanan received a communication from Parrott which said that the least news coming from California excited great interest in English

5th; Donelson to Polk, March 19th; Wickliffe to Polk, June 3, 4. Polk MSS.; Polk to Jackson, April 27th. Jackson MSS.

<sup>25</sup>Parrott to Buchanan, May 13, 1845. MS., State Department. Also for report that England was creating an unfriendly attitude in Mexico against the United States, see Shannon to Calhoun, March 27th. *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>Parrott to Buchanan, Aug. 5, 1845. MS., State Department.

<sup>27</sup>Same to same, Aug. 16th. *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>McNamarra's project was laid before Bankhead in 1844. He took only a "mild interest" in it at the time. Adams, *British Interests*, 253. Herrera, however, approved of it, though Paredes objected to the arrangement. Securing the consent of the Mexican government, McNamarra came to California where the assembly voted him a grant of 3000 leagues on July 4—an act which showed "a new feature in English policy, and a new method of obtaining California." Larkin to State Department, Aug. 18 and 24, 1846, *Official Correspondence*, II, Nos. 54-56. Benton and Frémont made much of this "McNamarra Scheme" as justifying the latter's participation in the Bear Flag Revolt. Bancroft devotes considerable space to this phase of the project.

circles, especially among the members of the British legation.<sup>29</sup> On the same day a despatch, written July 10, reached Washington from the American consul at Monterey. This communication of Larkin's deserves special mention. In it he stated that the Hudson's Bay Company<sup>30</sup> had furnished the native Californians with arms and ammunitions to expel the Mexican governor, General Micheltorena,<sup>31</sup> in the preceding year. At the time his despatch was being written, however, Larkin said,

There is no doubt in this country, but the troops now expected here in September [from Mexico] are sent at the instigation of the British Government under the plea that the American settlers in California want to revolutionize the country; it is rumored that two English houses in Mexico have become bound to the new general to accept his drafts as funds to pay his troops for eighteen months.<sup>32</sup>

Of even greater importance was the information in the same despatch that both France and England had appointed salaried consuls in California, neither of whom had any apparent commercial business. The British representative,<sup>33</sup> especially, was a fit

<sup>29</sup>Parrott to Buchanan, Sept. 2, 1845. MS., State Department.

<sup>30</sup>See also Larkin to Secretary of State, June 5th. MS., State Department—received Sept. 16th.

<sup>31</sup>The revolt here referred to was that against Micheltorena.

<sup>32</sup>Larkin to Secretary of State, July 10, 1845. MS., State Department; also Larkin, *Official Correspondence*, II, No. 25. The apparent inconsistency of charging the Hudson's Bay Company with aiding in the expulsion of Micheltorena and the British government with endeavoring to reinstate him is explained by the facts. In 1844 the British vice-consul, Forbes, was approached by the California leaders to know if his government would establish a protectorate over them in case they declared their independence. Forbes forwarded the information to the home government, both he and the consul, Barron, at Tepic, favoring the project. Upon the reply of the home office declining to have anything to do with it, however, "they transferred their support to the Mexican government, believing that Mexican control would be more favorable to British interests than an independent government in California." Adams, *British Interests*, 251. As early as 1842 Sir George Simpson wrote to Sir John H. Pelly (for the eyes of the government) that a single English cruiser on the coast with assurance of protection from Great Britain, would be sufficient for a declaration of independence on the part of the Californians and the establishment of a British protectorate. *Am. Hist. Review*, XIV, 89.

<sup>33</sup>For the activities of Alexander Forbes, see Adams, *British Interests*, 234-264, *passim*. On the other hand, Larkin seems to have forgotten that he himself urged a French consul's appointment. Larkin to Monsieur Gauden, Havre de Gras, April 21, 1844. Larkin MSS., II, No. 79.

subject for suspicion. His ranch was located forty miles inland; he had permission to carry on his private business, while receiving pay from the government; as there was no English commerce his appointment became a mere blind; and finally, he was concerned in the affairs of the "gigantic" Hudson's Bay Company.

The effect exerted by these despatches upon the policy of the administration will be considered later. It remains for the present to note further communications that were well calculated to arouse a like suspicion against England.

Slidell, when upon his mission to Mexico, at first was unable to learn "anything that would authorize the belief that attempts are making by any European Power, to obtain a cession of any territory on the Pacific Coast," though the late arrival of a son of Sir Robert Peel, as bearer of despatches, from the British fleet in the Pacific, had caused some comment.<sup>34</sup> Some ten or twelve days later, however, Slidell was writing for instructions as to the course he should pursue regarding the British mortgage on Mexican territory, in case a treaty was negotiated. The same despatch likewise carried information that England was hindering his reception by the Mexican government.<sup>35</sup>

*The rumored monarchy.*—About this time, also, reports came to the administration of a plan to establish a monarchy in Mexico and call in a European prince—an arrangement necessarily fatal to Polk's purpose of securing California. John Black, the American consul at Mexico City, first called attention to this danger, saying that it was commonly reported that the revolution then in progress had such an end in view. Reliable persons had informed him that agents were in Europe soliciting a foreign prince; while France, England and Spain, having countenanced the plan, were being looked to as the backers and sustainers of the new monarch.<sup>36</sup>

Shortly after the receipt of Black's despatch, a private letter, equally positive in tone, came to Polk from the American ambassador at London. "It need not surprise you to discover at no distant day," wrote McLane, "that a favorite scheme with the leading Powers of Europe is to *compose* the *Mexican* trouble by giving

<sup>34</sup>Slidell to Buchanan, Dec. 17, 1845. MS., State Department.

<sup>35</sup>Slidell to Buchanan, Dec. 29, 1845. *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Black to Buchanan, Dec. 30. *Ibid.*

her a Monarchical form of government and supplying the monarch from one of their own families.”<sup>37</sup>

Slidell soon added his voice to this testimony of Black and McLane, calling attention to the fact that *El Tiempo*, the official organ of the Paredes administration, had come out openly in favor of the monarchy.<sup>38</sup> Three weeks later, the consul at Vera Cruz wrote that the Mexican government was bent, beyond question, on putting the plan into operation, in order to secure foreign intervention against the United States.<sup>39</sup> These reports later called out a reply from Buchanan to Slidell stating that this report had been corroborated from other sources, but implying a doubt as to its foundation.<sup>40</sup> However, Slidell was to ferret the matter out, for it was a thing the American people could by no means permit. Later, Slidell wrote that a feeling favorable to the United States was arising among those in Mexico who opposed the idea; and in a second despatch outlined the difficulties its supporters had to overcome.<sup>41</sup> Still, he advised prompt and decisive measures on the part of the authorities at Washington to forestall its success. Two days after the receipt of this communication, the president consulted with Senator Benton as to what these measures should be.<sup>42</sup>

*Agitation in the press.*—While the reports of England’s designs upon California, and the establishment of a Mexican monarchy

<sup>37</sup>McLane to Polk, Jan. 17, 1846. Polk MSS. The plan was expected, McLane added, to arouse opposition in Europe to Polk’s message and strengthen England in the Oregon controversy.

<sup>38</sup>Slidell to Buchanan, Feb. 2, 1846. MS., State Department.

<sup>39</sup>Dimond to Buchanan, Feb. 21. *Ibid.* The following quotation shows the basis upon which these reports rested: “Bankhead’s interest . . . was greatly aroused by proposals . . . unofficially made by Mexicans of prominence that a solution of Mexican difficulties might be found in an overthrow of the republic and an establishment of a monarchy under a European prince. Bankhead was much attracted by the idea and Aberdeen expressed friendly interest.” E. D. Adams, “*English Interest in California*,” *Am. Hist. Review*, XIV, 761, note. This note does not appear in the chapter on California in the author’s “*British Interests and Activities in Texas*.”

<sup>40</sup>Buchanan to Slidell, March 13, 1846. MS., State Department. Rumor, said Buchanan, had already indicated the Spanish Prince Henry, son of Francisco de Paula, and the rejected suitor of Queen Isabella.

<sup>41</sup>Slidell to Buchanan, March 1 and 18. MS., State Department. See also Bancroft to McLane, March 29 in M. A. D. Howe, *Life and Letters of George Bancroft* (New York. Charles Scribner & Sons. 1908), I, 282.

<sup>42</sup>Polk, *Diary*, I, 326.

were reaching the state department, the same accounts were finding their way into the public prints. Larkin's despatch of July 10, in somewhat stronger form, was sent by him to the *New York Sun*, and from that journal copied by many of the other newspapers.<sup>43</sup> In it only two alternatives were given—either California, with all its resources and the mile-wide bay of San Francisco, must belong to the United States or pass into the hands of France or England. With California also went the possession of Oregon. "Why they are in service," said the published despatch in referring to the recently appointed foreign consuls against which the state department had likewise been warned, "their government best knows, and Uncle Sam will know to his cost."

"The exhaustless wealth of the mines of Mexico, the broad and fertile acres of the Californias will fall a prey to British rapacity should there be none to interpose," was the opinion of the *New Orleans Picayune*.<sup>44</sup> And even the staid *American Review* lifted up a voice of warning against English aggressions and in favor of American occupation.<sup>45</sup> The report of the proposed monarchy likewise received due publicity and unfavorable comment.<sup>46</sup> While the bitter attacks of the *London Times* against the United States as a nation of land-grabbers, and the repeated calls it made upon the British government to secure California or at least prevent its acquisition by the Americans, aroused no little indignation.<sup>47</sup>

*Effect upon the policy of the administration.*—The importance of the question of foreign interference in California lies not so much, however, in its effect upon the popular mind as upon the policy pursued by the government. On September 16, when considering the instructions for Slidell, Polk records that even the fact of his mission was to be kept secret, lest British or French

<sup>43</sup>Larkin to *New York Sun*, July 31, 1845. Larkin MSS., III, No. 235. Reprinted in *Niles' Register*, LXIX, 204; *Daily Union*, Oct. 21; *Charleston Mercury*, Oct. 22.

<sup>44</sup>*Picayune*, Sept. 27, 1845; see also *Daily Union*, June 16; *Richmond Enquirer*, Jan. 26, 1846.

<sup>45</sup>*American Review*, Jan., 1846.

<sup>46</sup>*Picayune*, Jan. 10, 1846; *Ibid.*, March 7 (extract from *Baltimore American*); *Daily Union*, March 10th and 16th.

<sup>47</sup>*Niles' Register*, LXVIII, 211; LXIX, 147; *Richmond Enquirer*, Sept. 12, 1845; *Daily Union*, Sept. 8, Oct. 23; *New York Journal of Commerce*, March 24, etc.

influences should thwart its purpose. And from this time on the numerous despatches on the subject of foreign interference, of which mention has been made, figured prominently in the administration's course of action.

The importance especially of Larkin's communication of July 10 in this connection has never been duly appreciated. Three days after its receipt, Buchanan wrote privately to McLane regarding the Oregon controversy, mentioning several reasons why the compromise measure would meet defeat in the senate. The chief of these he gave as follows:

The disposition of the two nations [France and England] to meddle in the concern of this continent, the strong suspicions entertained that they are now intriguing both in Mexico and California in relation to the latter:—all these have conspired to excite American feeling against Great Britain to a very high pitch. By advices from Monterey of the 10th of July last, we are informed of the arrival of a British and French consul in upper California without any ostensible commercial business—[Here followed the substance of Larkin's despatch, with a considerable portion of it in direct quotation] . . . I need not say to you what a flame would be kindled throughout the Union should Great Britain obtain a cession of California from Mexico or attempt to take possession of that province.<sup>49</sup>

As affairs were in such a state, Buchanan further advised McLane that he himself thought the time too critical for urging the Oregon question, although the president was determined to give the year's notice.<sup>50</sup>

It may be mentioned in this connection, simply as a matter of interest, that not long before, Polk had received from Robert Armstrong, his close personal friend and newly appointed consul to Liverpool, a letter strongly advising him never to settle the Oregon question short of 54° unless England gave up all pretensions to California. "England must never have California," were his words, "and it seems to be advisable to make Oregon the bone of

<sup>49</sup>Buchanan to McLane, Oct. 14, 1845. Polk MSS., Library of Congress; also a copy in the Polk MSS., of the Lennox Collection of the Library of the City of New York. The letter does not appear in the published writings of Buchanan by Moore.

<sup>50</sup>For Buchanan's endeavor to persuade Polk to assume a more moderate attitude, see Polk's *Diary*, I, 62-65.

contention to prevent it. The whole country will sustain you on Oregon."<sup>51</sup>

*England and Larkin's appointment.*—In addition to Buchanan's letter to McLane, the administration's fear of foreign interference was similarly shown in the instructions sent to Larkin and Slidell. Larkin's appointment as confidential agent has often been condemned as an act smacking of international dishonor. Yet it should be remembered that Polk had every reason to believe that an English and a French agent were likewise masquerading under the guise of consul for the purpose of influencing the political future of California.

In the instructions to Larkin, therefore, we should naturally expect much space to be devoted to the subject of British and French designs.<sup>52</sup> And we are not disappointed. The commercial interests of the United States demand that the American consul shall "exert the greatest vigilance in discovering and defeating any attempts which may be made by foreign governments to acquire a control" over California. The president cannot "view with indifference the transfer of California to Great Britain or any other European Power." European colonization on the North American continent must cease, as it can only work hurt to the United States and equal harm to the nations attempting it. The Californians, therefore, are to be warned of the danger of such domination to their peace and prosperity. They are to let events take their course along political lines unless Mexico endeavors to transfer them to Great Britain or France; then they are to resist with force—and the United States will assist them. Lastly, Larkin is not to awaken "the jealousy of the British or French agents" by assuming other than his consular character.<sup>53</sup>

*England and Slidell's instructions.*—The instructions to Slidell, first drawn up on September 16, but amended after the receipt of Larkin's 10th of July despatch,<sup>54</sup> laid an equally strong emphasis on the matter of foreign interference. One of the new minister's

<sup>51</sup>Armstrong to Polk, Aug. 4. Polk MSS.

<sup>52</sup>The same instructions were entrusted (probably) to Gillespie and Frémont.

<sup>53</sup>Buchanan to Larkin. Buchanan, *Works*, VI, 275-278. It should be noted that Buchanan assigned as his reasons for these warnings, etc. Larkin's despatch of July 10th.

<sup>54</sup>This despatch was received Oct. 4th.

duties was "to counteract the influence of foreign Powers exerted against the United States in Mexico." Also—a point frequently lost sight of—Slidell was expected to accomplish, at that particular time, the object for which he was sent, not merely because of "the wretched condition of the internal affairs of Mexico," but also on account of "the misunderstanding which exists between the Government and the Ministers of France and England."<sup>55</sup>

The same determination to resist European colonization that had been expressed to Larkin was contained, even in a stronger form, in this document received by Slidell. He was instructed to ascertain whether Mexico proposed ceding California to France or England, and to take steps to prevent any such action, "so fraught with danger to the best interests of the United States." For if all the advantages of San Francisco harbor "should be turned against our country, by the cession of California to Great Britain our principal commercial rival, the consequences would be most disastrous."<sup>56</sup>

*Polk's re-statement of the Monroe Doctrine.*—Polk, however, did not rest content with these secret efforts to thwart European influence in California. On December 2, came his first annual message with its enlarged affirmation of the Monroe Doctrine. California was not specifically mentioned in this document, but the wording was such as to be meaningless if applied to Oregon alone. This was so recognized at the time.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Polk told Benton definitely, while the message was in the course of preparation late in October, that he had California in mind as well as Oregon. Great Britain, he said, had her eye upon California, intending to possess it if possible; but the people of the United States would see that she did not. "California and the fine Bay of San Francisco" were to be protected from English aggression as well as Oregon. Like Cuba, California might re-

<sup>55</sup>For a report of this disagreement, see Parrott to Buchanan, Sept. 29 and Oct. 4. MSS., State Department.

<sup>56</sup>Buchanan, *Works*, VI, 294 et seq. The force of this idea of foreign control in California is still further shown in the opening paragraph of the part of these instructions dealing with California.—"There is another subject of vast importance to the United States which will demand your particular attention. From information possessed by this department it is seriously to be apprehended that both Great Britain and France have designs upon California."

<sup>57</sup>*Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., p. 350.



main under its present owners but never pass into the hands of a more powerful nation.<sup>58</sup>

It has sometimes been held that this application of the Monroe Doctrine was merely a bogey used by Polk to alarm the country and justify his subsequent course in the eyes of the nation. Enough, it is believed, has already been said to show the falsity of such a charge. When he wrote—"the people of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny. Should any portion of them, constituting an independent state, propose to unite themselves with our confederacy, this will be a question for them and for us to determine without any foreign interference"<sup>59</sup>—Polk desired to warn England that the United States would brook no interference in case the program entrusted to Larkin in California was a success, and the inhabitants sought annexation to this country.

Similarly, when he announced that "no future European colony or dominion, shall with our consent, be planted or established on any part of the North American continent,"<sup>60</sup> he wished to announce clearly and distinctly to the British government that any attempt she might make to gain control of California would be opposed, with arms if necessary, by the United States.

*Did Polk's fear of England hasten the Mexican War?*—The foregoing discussion, it is hoped, has shown something of the apprehension that existed in the mind of President Polk and his advisers, lest, either directly or indirectly, European influence should hinder the acquisition of California by the United States. How large a part this played in bringing on the Mexican War, would be interesting, but impossible, to say. In arriving at the effect of this apprehension, however, it should be remembered that Polk's attitude on all great public questions was moulded largely by Andrew Jackson, who had warned him against England both in her relation to Texas and California,<sup>61</sup> and that he had every reason to believe, and did thoroughly believe, from the reports that came from Mexico and California that European in-

<sup>58</sup>Polk, *Diary*, I, 71 (Oct. 24th).

<sup>59</sup>James D. Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (Washington. Gov't Printing Office. 1896), IV, 398.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>61</sup>*A. p. Cong. Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 sess., p. 445.

fluence was at work to defeat his purpose. He laid the blame for Slidell's rejection directly at England's door.<sup>62</sup> And even as late as the outbreak of the war, his secretary of state feared that if England learned of his determination to acquire California, she, and perhaps France, would join Mexico against the United States.<sup>63</sup> But whatever influence this may have exerted upon Polk's determination to commence hostilities, it surely was not with insincerity that he wrote after the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, "The immense value of ceded territory does not consist alone in the amount of money for which the public lands may be sold . . . the fact that it has become a part of the Union and cannot be subject to European power, constitutes ample indemnity for the past."<sup>64</sup>

## CHAPTER VI

### SLAVERY AND THE EARLY SENTIMENT FOR ANNEXATION\*

Before bringing to a close this discussion of American interest in California prior to the Mexican War, a word must be said regarding the idea that Polk's desire for California was prompted largely by his wish to extend the area of slavery, and that the acquisition of the territory itself was brought about chiefly through Southern efforts. Of late years, with the clearing away of much of the historic mist and fog, arising from the bitter controversies before the Civil War, the whole subject of slavery in its relation to territorial expansion is seen in a clearer and less distorted light. Even the annexation of Texas is coming to be considered chiefly as a phase of the westward progress of the American people and no longer a mere device of slave holding states.

To a much more marked degree, is this true of the new attitude toward the acquisition of California. Yet the charge has been made so frequently in one form or another that 'the Southerners were after bigger pens to cram with slaves'—"having ac-

<sup>62</sup>*Diary*, I, 337 (April 18, 1846).

<sup>63</sup>*Diary*, I, 396-399 (May 13th).

<sup>64</sup>Richardson, IV, 599.

*\*This does not pretend to be an adequate or exhaustive study of the subject. It is written only to show in a broad way why the acquisition of California cannot be considered a slavery measure.*

quired Texas they longed for New Mexico and California,"—it seems well to point out a few salient facts that such writers as Rhodes,<sup>1</sup> Henry Wilson,<sup>2</sup> Jay,<sup>3</sup> H. H. Bancroft,<sup>4</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge<sup>5</sup> and other members of the older<sup>6</sup> school of American historians, have apparently overlooked.

One indeed has difficulty in finding any true grounds at all for the opinion of this group. Their argument, however, runs about as follows: The Mexican War had as its object the acquisition of California; it occurred during the administration of a southern president, and was largely the product of his own devising; it was therefore fought simply to extend the area of slavery. As Henry Wilson expressed it in *The Rise and Fall of the Slave Power*, the "march into territory inhabited by Mexicans . . . meant more than 'to defend our own and the rights of Texas.' It could only mean, it did mean, the acquisition of more territory, in which to establish slavery, and by which the further extension and development of slave holding institutions could be promoted."

Those who adopt this course of reasoning, however, leave out of consideration a most essential fact. The movement for the annexation of California, as we have endeavored to show, did not begin with the presidency of James K. Polk, nor with the outbreak of the Mexican War. It originated more than a decade before either of these events and by 1846 had developed such strength and headway that its successful culmination was merely a matter of time, as was even then pretty generally recognized. After 1846 the course of the movement was obscured by the acrimonious debates over the conduct of the war, and the Wilmot Proviso—the latter especially precipitating a conflict of principle in which the south took an active and determined part. It is scarcely possible, however, to maintain, as some have done, that

<sup>1</sup>James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States* (New York, Macmillan. 1894), I, 87.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Wilson, *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* (Boston. Houghton, Mifflin and Company. 1879), II, 9.

<sup>3</sup>Jay, *Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Mexican War*, 107.

<sup>4</sup>H. H. Bancroft, *Works*, XIII, 344.

<sup>5</sup>Henry Cabot Lodge, *Daniel Webster* (American Statesman Series), 289.

<sup>6</sup>For a more recent writer taking this view, see H. Addington Bruce, *Romance of American Expansion* (New York. Moffat, Yard & Co. 1909), 139.

the pro-slavery forces originated and gave vigor to the actual movement for annexation, because they opposed the Wilmot Proviso. We shall save ourselves from this error if we remember that the question at issue from 1846 until 1850 was, after all, not so much one of acquisition, *per se*, as of method and status. We are not concerned at this time with the way in which California was secured nor with the contest as to whether it should be free territory or slave. Our contention is simply this, that the keen desire for Mexican territory on the Pacific, which developed among the American people prior to 1846 and found its gratification in the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, was not inspired by sectional issues, and in no sense deserves to be called a slavery measure.

*California as an off-set to Texas.*—There are a number of reasons upon which we venture to base this assertion. In the first place, contrary to the generally accepted view of the matter, before 1845 the south proposed the acquisition of California as free territory in order to neutralize the opposition of the north to the annexation of Texas.

We have already seen that Jackson urged upon Wharton the necessity of including California within the limits of Texas in order to reconcile the commercial interests of the north and east to the program of annexation by giving them a harbor on the Pacific.<sup>7</sup> Waddy Thompson, Calhoun's friend and political disciple, did not expect to see slavery established in the territory whose acquisition he so strenuously urged, but thought the north would favor his project because of their commercial and fishing interests.<sup>8</sup> The same idea was present in Tyler's plan of a tripartite agreement when early in 1843 he wrote Webster:

The mere recognition of Texas, would have the effect . . . of separating that question from California . . . and using up all the agitations which you anticipated. Whereas introduced into the same treaty the three interests would be united and would satisfy all sections of the country. Texas might not stand alone nor would the line proposed for Oregon. Texas would reconcile all to the line, while California would reconcile or pacify all to Oregon.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>THE QUARTERLY, XVIII. 17.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

As late, too, as March 10, 1846, the Charleston *Mercury* credited the rumored annexation of California to the Whigs as an offset to the annexation of Texas, and congratulated that party on thus endeavoring to regain popular favor. While even that knight errant of the anti-slavery cause, Joshua R. Giddings, seems to have thought of the annexation movement from beginning to end solely as a free soil movement. Speaking on the floor of the house on July 14, 1846, he charged President Polk with seeking the annexation, not of California, but of the Mexican states north of the 22d parallel in order to establish slavery in the territory so secured, "at the moment," as he said, "when our rapidly increasing population is flowing into Oregon and California,—when free states are growing up in the former and the latter gives promise of preparation for annexation as a counterpart of Texas . . ."<sup>10</sup>

*Favorable attitude in the north.*—A second reason for the belief that the annexation of California was not a slavery measure, is the fact that the movement found its strongest popular favor in the north. Most of the contemporary newspaper and magazine articles which advocated the acquisition of this portion of Mexican territory first appeared in New York or New England. Thomas O. Larkin and other American residents of California were regular correspondents, not for southern newspapers, but for the Boston *Daily Advertiser*, the New York *Journal of Commerce*, and the New York *Sun*—the editor of the *Sun*, especially making it the settled policy of his paper to create a sentiment for annexation by publishing the most glowing accounts of California obtainable, and seeking to arouse public interest in other ways best known to members of his profession.

In this connection it may be of passing interest to call attention to articles that appeared in two leading American periodicals of January, 1846. One published in the *American Review*, known to its opponents as the "Text Book of the Whig Party," gave a complete, though somewhat exaggerated picture of the rich resources of California, spoke of the miserable control exercised by Mexico over the province, and urged its immediate annexation to the United States, provided this could be accomplished by

<sup>10</sup>Speeches in Congress by Joshua R. Giddings (Boston and Cleveland. Jewett & Co. 1853), 258-259.

peaceful means.<sup>11</sup> In De Bow's *Review*, afterwards the most influential journal of the south, an important place was also given to a discussion of California. The picture here drawn, however, was, in marked contrast to the glowing description of the northern writer, dreary in the extreme. California's soil was hopelessly sterile and cursed with drought, while its other resources were so limited that the country "would never become of any great importance in the history of the world or advance to any conspicuous position, either agriculturally, commercially, or politically."<sup>12</sup>

De Bow's article probably did not represent the common opinion of the south. Yet the interest with which the commercial states of the north regarded the future of California was unquestionably greater than that of any other section of the country, with the possible exception of the extreme west. For it was natural that those who had important trade relations not merely with California, but with India, China, and the Sandwich Islands, beside extensive whale fisheries, should of all others desire most eagerly a harbor and territory on the Pacific. It was for this reason, as much as any other, that Webster, who would scarcely be called the champion of slavery, considered San Francisco as twenty times more valuable than all Texas, and was so desirous of securing California while secretary of state that he even proposed to take Everett's place as ambassador to England in order to facilitate the adoption of the tripartite agreement.<sup>13</sup>

*Character of immigration.*—So far, also, as forces were at work locally in California to bring about a cession of the province to the United States, one finds the influence almost wholly of northern origin. Indeed, the charge that southern immigrants and southern leaders acted dishonorably in Texan affairs, can be returned (if in either case the charges are valid) with good interest against the north in the case of California. Lansford W. Hast-

<sup>11</sup>Above, p. 242. As early as March 5, 1845, the *Journal of Commerce* credited the Whigs with aiming to secure California in order to offset the popularity the Democrats had won in urging the annexation of Texas. See also *Richmond Enquirer*, Jan. 26, 1846.

<sup>12</sup>De Bow, *Commercial Review*, I, 65-66. "It was this article that first brought De Bow into prominence and that was quoted in debate in the French Chamber of Deputies." H. P. Dart, in *Tulane University Magazine*, bound in copy of above in University of California Library.

<sup>13</sup>THE QUARTERLY, XVIII, 33.

ings, the leader of a very ambitious scheme for independence, came from Connecticut, Marsh, his associate, Alfred Robinson, and J. T. Farnham, whose writings stimulated widespread interest in California throughout the United States, were also natives of New England; while Abel Stearns, Larkin's confidential advisor in Southern California, and Larkin himself, who played such an important part in the whole annexation movement, were from Massachusetts. Indeed it is hard to find more than one or two resident Americans of any prominence in California at this time who were not of New England origin.<sup>14</sup> As for the rank and file of immigrants who arrived in California up to 1846, it cannot be said that they came from any one section of the Union. Some were from the south and some from New England; while the great majority were from the frontier states of the west. Many had set out originally for Oregon but for one reason or another had changed their destination to California. They were trappers, farmers, mechanics and laborers who thought as little of establishing slavery as of setting up a monarchical government.<sup>15</sup>

*Proposed boundary lines.*—One further point remains to be discussed, which of itself precludes any idea that the desire to establish slavery in California furnished the motive for its annexation. On August 6, 1835, the United States government made its first attempt to purchase California. Forsyth's instructions of that date to Butler placed the desired line of boundary on the 37th parallel and expressly disclaimed any purpose of securing territory further south, or below the Bay of San Francisco. Something like a year later, Jackson offered the captured president of the Mexican Republic, who had been sent to Washington by the victorious Texans, three and one-half million dollars on behalf of the United States, for a line extending along the 38th parallel from the Rio Grande to the Pacific. On June 17, 1842, Webster instructed Thompson to secure, if possible, territory on the Pacific in return for the American claims against Mexico. The main ob-

<sup>14</sup>Bancroft, *Pioneer Register and Index*. In a list of those of any prominence in California prepared by Larkin for the State Department, nine were from New England, two from New York, one from Ohio, one from Maryland, and three unspecified.

<sup>15</sup>Larkin to State Department, June 15, 1846 (*Description of California in Official Correspondence*, Pt. II, 94-96); Sutter to Larkin, July 15, 1846. Larkin MSS., III, No. 220.

ject of the negotiations, according to the despatch, was to secure the harbor of San Francisco, although other territory might be added. Later, this same purpose was expressed in the terms of the tripartite agreement forwarded to Edward Everett at London.

On Nov. 8, 1845, Secretary of State Buchanan sent to Slidell, Polk's confidential Mexican agent, his official instructions, by which he was empowered to offer the Mexican government something over \$25,000,000 for a line extending west from the southern boundary of New Mexico, or "for any line that should include Monterey within the territory ceded to the United States." If this could not be obtained, he was to offer \$20,000,000 for a "line commencing at any point on the Western line of New Mexico and running due West, so as to include the Bay and Harbor of San Francisco."<sup>16</sup>

It is surely a puzzling problem, why, if the acquisition of California owed its origin to slavery, these official instructions for its purchase, constituting all that were issued between 1835 and the outbreak of the Mexican War, without exception should have placed the desired line of boundary above, or only slightly below, the 36° 30' parallel, where under no circumstances could slavery hope to exist.

*Southern opposition to President Polk.*—Up to 1846, therefore, the matter of acquiring California, both in the province itself and throughout the United States, can scarcely be considered as a slavery, or even a sectional measure. With the outbreak of the Mexican War and the bitter controversy arising over the Wilmot Proviso a few months later, the entire aspect of affairs was changed, and the subject becomes too complicated to be susceptible of adequate treatment in this place. And yet even from this time on there is certainly no such clear sectional division on the question as many writers of a past generation would have us believe. On the contrary, it found its advocates as well as its opponents both in the north and in the south. It was Alexander Stephens of Georgia who introduced a resolution on January 22, 1847, in the house, that no portion of Mexican territory should be acquired as the result of the war; while Berrien of the same state attempted

<sup>16</sup>This despatch to Slidell, as well as the other references to boundary just cited, have received due notice elsewhere in this discussion.



to secure the passage of a like resolution in the senate as an amendment to the three million bill, some ten days later.<sup>17</sup>

"I say in my humble judgment and speaking as a southern senator representing a southern state," said Berrien on this subject, "that the duty of the south—the interests of the south—the safety of the south—demands that we should oppose ourselves to any and every acquisition of territory."<sup>18</sup> Badger, of North Carolina, echoed Berrien's statement and denied that the people of his state desired an addition of territory from Mexico to any considerable extent.<sup>19</sup> Butler, of South Carolina, cared only for the port of San Francisco and rejoiced that this lay above the line of the Missouri Compromise.<sup>20</sup> Toombs was opposed to taking "an inch" of Mexican territory.<sup>21</sup>

In his own party, also, Polk found his strongest opponents to be southern men. Of the twelve Democrats opposing the war resolution in the house, eleven came from the south.<sup>22</sup> Calhoun and his followers were of course against the president, and cared so little for California that they were willing to imperil its acquisition for the sake of discrediting the administration.<sup>23</sup>

*Polk's views.*—Turning to Polk's own conception of slavery in its relation to California, we shall find it, also, entirely different from what some writers have led us to believe. Though Polk wanted the line of boundary to run somewhat farther south,<sup>24</sup> Slidell's instructions laid emphasis only upon the possession of San Francisco; and it was this harbor, and not a new area for slavery, that

<sup>17</sup>*Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 240, 310. Ewing of Tennessee introduced a similar measure, *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 330. See also Von Holst, *Political and Constitutional History of the United States*, III, 303.

<sup>19</sup>*Ap. Cong. Globe*, 30 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 121-122. See also *Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., p. 338.

<sup>20</sup>*Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., p. 448.

<sup>21</sup>*Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., p. 141.

<sup>22</sup>*Ap. Globe*, *Ibid.*, pp. 412-413.

<sup>23</sup>Calhoun's attitude is seen best in his correspondence during the period. He feared lest Polk should attempt to seize the whole of Mexico. Polk asserted that Calhoun was almost indifferent at this time to the establishment of slavery in California. *Diary*, II, 283-284. For the further division in the south against the president's policy, see the *Charleston Mercury* of Feb. 10, 1847.

<sup>24</sup>*Diary*, I, 34-35. The line suggested by Polk ran about on the 32<sup>d</sup> parallel.

was considered "all important to the United States."<sup>25</sup> An added proof of the lack of sectional bias in Polk's efforts to secure the territory is shown by the fact that when he wished to send a regiment, whose members should eventually become citizens of California, he chose New York as the field for enrollment and not one of the southern states as he might well have done.<sup>26</sup>

The president's own words, however, unless we are to believe him absolutely insincere, best explain his position. He regarded the Wilmot proviso as "a mischievous and foolish amendment"; and believed that slavery should in no way be connected with the peace negotiations with Mexico, or with the war. Those who insisted upon joining the two called forth his condemnation, as working ruin to the country.<sup>27</sup>

His own plan for the settlement of the question was stated repeatedly in his *Diary*, and can in no way be construed as favoring the south against the north. In referring to a visit from Senator Crittenden, the Whig senator from Kentucky, to whom he had spoken of securing New Mexico and California as indemnity, he wrote,

I told him I deprecated the agitation of the slavery question in Congress, and though a South-Western man and from a slaveholding state as well as himself I did not desire to acquire a more Southern Territory than that which I had indicated, because I did not desire by so doing to give occasion for the agitation of a question which might serve to endanger the Union itself. I told him the question would probably never be a practical one if we acquired New Mexico and California because there would be but a narrow ribbon of territory south of the Missouri Compromise line of 36° 30' and in it slavery would probably never exist.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Slidell's instructions already cited.

<sup>26</sup>Marcy to Col. J. D. Stevenson, June 26, 1847. *Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., p. 809. The men were to be of "good habits" and "various pursuits" who would remain as citizens when the war was over. They left New York October 26, arriving in San Francisco March 6, 1847. Three hundred of the regiment were still living in California in 1867. Cronise, *Natural Wealth of California*, 54-55.

<sup>27</sup>*Diary*, II, 75 (August 10, 1846); *Ibid.*, 305 (Jan. 4, 1847).

<sup>28</sup>*Diary*, II, 350. Polk had expressed the same idea to David Wilmot (*Ibid.*, 289) and to Calhoun (p. 283), as well as to others. He had favored the extension of the same line in the annexation of Texas (Curtis, *Buchanan*, I, 580). He thought if this plan were adopted in settling the controversy over California and New Mexico, "harmony would be restored to the Union and the danger of forming geographical parties avoided." *Diary*, June 24, 1848.

Exactly why Polk should send Slidell to Mexico, appoint a confidential agent in California, offer twenty-five millions of dollars, and perhaps go to war for the purpose of securing a "narrow ribbon of territory" in which to establish an abstract slavery, does not clearly appear. So far from being an ardent champion of the south, on the contrary, the president was far more open to the criticism of his opponents that he was favoring the north.<sup>29</sup> The larger part of the territory, and the only part considered of much value, lay above the Missouri Compromise line.<sup>30</sup> Though refusing to have anything to do with the Wilmot Proviso, Polk expressed a willingness, even against southern opposition, to sign a bill prohibiting slavery in Oregon.<sup>31</sup> And when urged by Calhoun to appoint southern men to control the government in California and New Mexico, he declined to commit himself.<sup>32</sup>

In the complete bewilderment with which the president saw the injection of the slavery question into the debates on the acquisition of California; and in the middle ground he occupied between the extremists both of the north and of the south,<sup>33</sup> one sees how sincerely he regarded the measure as national and not sectional

<sup>29</sup>*Charleston Mercury*, Feb. 17, 1847. A rumor had arisen that Polk would not negotiate for territory south of 36° 30'. If this were true, said the writer, the south would do well to face the issue at once "while our men have arms in their hands."

Calhoun considered Polk as his direct opponent, and classed him with the "most rabid of the Whigs" when endeavoring to secure the adoption of his "Address of the Southern Delegates . . . to their constituents." Calhoun to Mrs. T. G. Clemson, Jan. 24, 1849. *Correspondence*, p. 761, and note.

<sup>30</sup>*Daily Union*, Feb. 19, 1847 (Denial of a charge of sectionalism against Polk).

<sup>31</sup>*Diary*, III (entry for August 8, 1848).

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.* (entry for July 16, 1848).

<sup>33</sup>On Jan. 22, 1847, he wrote, "Even the question of slavery is thrown into Congress and agitated in the midst of a foreign war for political purposes. It is brought forward at the north by a few ultra Northern members to advance the prospects of their favorite [for president]. No sooner is it introduced than a few ultra Southern members are manifestly well satisfied that it has been brought forward, because by seizing upon it they hope to array a Southern party in favour of their favorite candidate for the presidency. There is no patriotism on either side, it is a most wicked agitation that can end in no good and must produce infinite mischief." (*Ibid.*, II, 348.) See also page 340 . . . "they are engaged in discussing the abstract question of slavery, and gravely considering whether it shall exist in a territory which we have not yet acquired and may never acquire from Mexico. The presidential election of 1848 has evidently much to do with this factious state of things."

in scope. We may perhaps blame Polk for failing to perceive that his desire for empire would inevitably bring the great issues of slavery before the American people. But we can scarcely say he had anything less than the interest of the whole nation at heart. Like Jackson he was more the product of the west than of the south, and he looked through the eyes neither of Calhoun nor of Adams, but of Jackson. He was not sectional, and if he overlooked the significance of slavery in its bearing upon California, it was because his thoughts ran to national greatness. His object was not to secure 'bigger pens to cram with slaves,' but to give to the United States wide boundaries and the mastery of the Pacific.

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